

Leader Authenticity in Intercultural School Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes that effective leadership in intercultural schools requires authentic understanding and related action; and that this can only be sought through a dedication to ongoing leadership learning. After briefly introducing the metaphor of authentic leadership, outlining the influence of culture on school leadership and the context of intercultural schools the paper suggests a number of learning avenues through which leaders can consciously reframe and better understand problems and solutions around these intercultural school contexts. These interrelated avenues include learning beyond standardised leadership prescriptions, simultaneously trusting and mistrusting experience, learning through student learning, learning through variation, learning through looking beyond culture and learning through curiosity. The major theme running through related discussion is that authentic intercultural leadership is particularly attuned to the values, beliefs and behavioural uniqueness of the students, teachers and others which comprise the community. In other words, it aims to acquire intercultural understanding on an ongoing basis and use this to inform leadership beliefs and practice. Therefore, authentic leadership and learning can be viewed as inseparably twinned.

KEYWORDS *authentic leadership, educational leadership, leadership, leadership development, professional development, values, intercultural*

Introduction

In this article we explore some of the challenges associated with leading with authenticity in intercultural school settings. In doing so we focus on the influence of culture on how schools operate and the ways in which leaders can develop authenticity within their professional contexts. Following Begley's (2004) notion of 'leadership seeking authenticity' we argue that authenticity is not something that can ever be truly found; rather it is revealed piece by piece through an ongoing iterative process of learning through purposefully engaging students, teachers and the broader community to understand the meaning they

ascribe to their school. As such, personal leader authenticity in schools does not lie within standardized prescriptions that tell us how schools should work, but through interpreting what makes sense to others through ongoing social interaction and learning.

Our basic argument is that a deeper understanding of different cultural orientations can be used as the basis for ongoing leadership learning, and that this learning is in essence what constitutes Begley's (2004) notion of leaders 'seeking authenticity'. We propose that effective leadership in intercultural schools requires authentic understanding and subsequent related action; and that this can only be sought through a dedication to ongoing leadership learning. In line with this we suggest a number of learning avenues through which leaders can consciously reframe and better understand problems and solutions around intercultural school contexts. In order to arrive at these avenues we briefly introduce: the metaphor of authentic leadership; the influence of culture on school leadership; and the context of intercultural schools. Discussion in these areas provides a necessary precursor to the search for authentic leadership in intercultural schools as they express the broader context within which learning happens.

Authentic leadership is not something which comes just through clarifying and adhering to a set of personal beliefs, nor does it have a definitive endpoint. Rather, it is an ongoing interaction between how well one understands oneself within the meanings of a given educational context; and what can best be done to improve student lives and learning within this context. As such, the same leader, if operating in different contexts, will incorporate understandings of diverse community needs and other contextually relevant perspectives to build their authenticity. Given that school contexts are inevitably in a state of flux, this means that effective leaders constantly seek to refine or even redefine their authenticity. For example, within a school, leaders watch for shifting demographics, emerging student and societal needs, different pedagogies and so on to help make what they do authentic to the situation. Likewise, a leader moving from an established, high-performing school to a less secure or underperforming school needs to continue to redefine what is meaningful within that context.

At the base of authenticity is a dedication to ongoing leadership learning. Learning can be loosely conceptualized as seeking, exposing and accepting gaps between what is 'known' and what really exists or what could be. Learning happens when this gap in knowing produces cognitive conflict and challenges ingrained assumptions, beliefs and ways of working. In other words, it is about leaders seeing and making sense of what happens in their schools and then working to make things better through generating new approaches to learning or relationship building. This does not imply an absence of leader values or beliefs, or even self-interest, but rather an acceptance that these must be constructed within different social and organizational contexts.

Although we concentrate on the complexities of leading in intercultural schools, we do not deny that leaders the world over struggle to find authenticity

within the confused or 'hypercomplex' environments within which they work (Moos, 2005). School leadership is inevitably uncertain and tension-ridden. All education leaders are challenged to be authentic as they traverse the unsteady terrain created by conflicting internal and external values, structures and expectations—this is well established in the literature (Bottery, 2004). However, we suggest that the quest for leader authenticity is further complicated when a leader's traditional cultural orientations diverge from those of their school community.

Our focus on culture as shared patterns of values, norms and beliefs that can differentiate different ethnic groups does not discount the fact that numerous other factors influence schools and leaders. These include, but are not restricted to, social, political, religious, historical and economic influences. The latter often arrive through neo-liberal educational policies promoting marketization and standardization. Nor is culture as we use it here the only form of diversity to which leaders need attend: issues such as class and gender, both within and between cultural groups, for example, are equally influential in their lives (Coleman and Cardno, 2006). Despite this recognition, however, we hold that culture continues to exert a powerful influence on what happens in schools, and hence on authentic school leadership (Hallinger, 2004).

Leader Authenticity

The essential role of leaders in effective schools and successful school improvement processes is firmly established (Hallinger and Heck, 1999; Hallinger, 2003; Huber, 2004). Inseparably linked to this assertion is the challenge of revealing *how* they make this difference (Southworth, 2005). A key aspect of this involves recognition that *how* leaders make a difference in schools is contingent upon the context within which they lead. The ways in which leaders learn to lead and make a positive difference are constructed within a social milieu comprised of multiple, overlapping and constantly shifting contextual factors. Cultural values, the dominant values held by a particular cultural group, are among the most influential of these as they shape the norms and beliefs that students, teachers and their wider social affiliations bring to school. For example, people raised in vertically aligned cultural systems may operate very differently from those growing up in more democratic systems. Likewise, leaders in schools comprised of large numbers of ethnic minority students face different demands than those in more ethnically homogeneous settings. It is therefore axiomatic that if leaders in intercultural schools are to make a difference then they must learn to understand the cultural influences affecting their schools; this calls for the development of leader authenticity.

Our basis for framing leader authenticity is informed by what Begley (2004) calls 'leadership seeking authenticity' and is grounded within an understanding of the valuation process. To use his words: 'Authentic leadership may be thought of as a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound and

consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This is leadership that is knowledge-based, values informed, and skilfully executed. These notions generate the following proposition: Authentic leadership is a function of self-knowledge, sensitivity to the orientations of others, and a technical sophistication that leads to a synergy of leadership action' (2004: 5).

Starratt (2005a) locates leader authenticity within a discussion of learning-centredness. He provides three principles for those seeking to exercise such leadership. The first is that authentic leadership cannot be conceptualized purely in terms of interpersonal morality. To do so, he claims, is to ignore the fact that leadership is exercised within an institutional context, one which is certainly not neutral in terms of structure or equality. The second is that leadership is not simply about mastering skills, strategies and techniques in search of better test scores and that an over-concentration on such results neglects the authentic meaning of learning. His third point is that leadership must not be focused on the learning of adults without first considering the authenticity of student learning and associated teaching strategies, relationships and resource allocation (Starratt, 2005a). In short, authenticity cannot be developed in isolation from the school and the societal context within which leadership is exercised. We hold that an important aspect of this context is the cultures that students and teachers bring with them into any institutional setting.

Begley and Starratt concur that authenticity must account for a broad range of factors relevant to leadership life. Begley (2004) expounds three interrelated points which help underpin the rationale of this article. The first is that ethics alone cannot explain the array of human behaviour and, therefore, are not always a suitable basis for administrative decisions. The second is that authentic leadership must also account for institutional, policy and other related perspectives germane to the contexts within which leadership attempts to make a difference. The third is that it is important to acknowledge that authentic leadership is a cultural construction. For example, the meaning of key 'reform' concepts such as 'empowerment' or 'distributed leadership' can be very different in diverse cultures and different intercultural school contexts (Walker, 2004; Jansen, 2006).

Leader authenticity is thus context specific; it moves beyond the personal to include the institutional (including teacher and classroom practices and beliefs) and focuses on what students 'bring to school' and what they 'really' need to learn. It needs to be continually refined and cannot be defined or operationalized in absolute, formal, subjective or imposed forms. Authentic leadership, then, is constructed and reconstructed within a number of overlapping elements, one of which is the culture or cultures that describe the school. As such, questions emerge about the nature and formation of authenticity in intercultural contexts where the lines that once bound schools, societies and leadership have become increasingly blurred.

Culture and Leadership

Leadership is centrally concerned with the interpretation and enactment of values. In previous work we have asserted the influence of traditional culture on school leadership and organization (Dimmock and Walker, 1998; Walker and Dimmock, 2002; Hallinger et al., 2005) and begun to apply elements of this understanding to leadership in intercultural school contexts (Dimmock and Walker, 2004; Walker and Dimmock, 2005). Others have also addressed this in considerable depth within the broader concept of diversity (Blackmore, 2006).

As with attempts to understand the concept of culture itself, the influence of culture on leadership, organizational behaviour and student learning transpires in a constantly contested domain. There are ongoing arguments over the existence and extent of the influence of culture on leadership, and the influence of leadership on culture in institutional settings (Walker, 2005b). Such debate is useful in that it informs the unsteady mix of values that impacts leadership in intercultural school contexts.

We assert that the values towards which school communities and their leaders strive may differ in significant ways from those that often dominate their broader societies. In taking this stance we acknowledge that cultural values intermingle with other, often conflicting, values, personalities, structures and contexts to shape school leadership and life. The interplay between these value sets takes an assortment of hidden and practical forms in schools as students, teachers and leaders attempt to make sense of their role and, in the best of circumstances, strive toward the authenticity needed to drive schools and societies forward. The notion of cultural hybridity and all it carries with it typifies leaders' lives.

The influence of cultural values on leadership and organization behaviour is a complex issue, one which has not been, and probably never will be, resolved; however, in essence, even though cultural values exist within a complex and vibrant broader context, they continue to exert a strong influence on people's lives. As such, cultural values form a key element of the hybrid environment for leaders in intercultural schools. Leaders of these schools face confusion, as well as opportunity, due to the ceaseless interplay of the sometimes ill-fitting cultural values carried by their students, teachers and broader community; as well as those bombarding them through policy and other education agencies. In this paper we focus on the influences clustering around cultural values.

Intercultural School Contexts

What we label intercultural schools can take any number of configurations. One way to conceptualize these is to examine the extent to which different value sets 'fit' together in a school. As used here, fit refers to the congruence, or lack thereof, between the cultural values which underpin the actions and behaviours of the different groups which comprise the school and its wider

community. These may range from schools catering to multiple cultural groups, schools comprised of a single minority group within a community dominated by the majority group or culturally homogeneous schools in non-Western settings that incorporate imported changes underpinned by largely foreign cultural values.

The concept of fit may be applied in different ways. For example, there may be fit between the values of the student body and the schools' more immediate internal and external community (student-fit-community). We may further refer to the fit between the leaders' and/or teachers' cultural values and those of the broader school community, as comprised of students, parents and other community groups (teacher-fit-community). Alternatively, the fit may be between the cultural values of the school and those underpinning the changes constantly pushed into schools (school-fit-change). It is argued that the presence or absence of congruence shapes a key context within which leaders seek to define their authenticity.

Intercultural schools are increasingly common around the world. In the UK, for example, schools must meet the needs of the growing number of students from Middle-Eastern, East European and Afro-Caribbean communities. As well as continuing to struggle with the meaningful education of Aboriginal students, Australian schools include Vietnamese, Pacific-Island and Middle-Eastern students among many others. Similar situations are also prevalent in the USA, Canada, New Zealand and throughout continental Europe. Even in apparently homogeneous societies such as Mainland China intercultural schools are becoming more commonplace. For example, schools in major cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou now serve growing numbers of ethnic minority, migrant and even international students. In addition, the ever-growing number of international schools scattered around the world are moving from their colonially driven role of educating an expatriate elite to meeting the needs of multiple cultural groups and increasingly diversified societies.

Following Starratt's (2005a, 2005b) position, leadership authenticity within intercultural schools involves more than leaders simply clarifying and articulating personal values, beliefs and purpose statements. Rather, it must carefully account for the cultures which comprise the school and how these impact relationships, curriculum and learning and teaching, among other things. If we accept this proposition, the issue becomes what leaders can do to build their authenticity in intercultural school contexts. If we further accept that schools and values configurations are constantly shifting, adapting and evolving within and outside organizations, seeking leader authenticity is actually a process of learning in and from the context within which leaders lead (Walker, 2005). As such, and like much of a school leader's life, seeking leader authenticity in intercultural contexts it is a circular process without an ultimate or explicit endpoint which calls for constant learning.

'Learning' to Lead Authentically in Intercultural Schools

Leading in intercultural schools requires a variation on what Spariosu (2004) calls global intelligence. Global intelligence involves gaining an understanding of the intricacies, influence and place of culture. He (2004: 38) defines global intelligence as 'the ability to understand, respond to and work toward what is in the best interest of and what will benefit all human beings'. He suggests that this can only emerge from 'continuing intercultural research, dialogue, negotiation and mutual cooperation' (2004: 39). In other words, it is an interactive learning phenomenon which considers global and local notions of cultural difference and identity. Notions of authenticity are invariably linked to ideas of culture and in terms of schools, to the workings of intercultural organizations. Leader authenticity then is an interactive and responsive process leading to understanding and action, rather than confrontation or antagonism.

Leaders seeking authenticity increase their cultural understanding through learning in a way that leads to improved practice in schools. This involves much more than recognizing cultural influence and accepting or simply making allowances for it: leaders seek pragmatic understanding as a device through which they examine their own practice and theories-in-use with the goal of informing educational praxis. As such, it involves learning to understand what happens in their intercultural organizations.

Leader authenticity in intercultural schools can only develop within an understanding of the cultures which comprise the school. Given that school cultures are in continuous flux—forming, re-forming and shifting—then becoming authentic is actually about learning. Therefore, school leaders who seek authenticity in intercultural schools contend with learning on an ongoing basis—or finding ways to reframe problems and solutions within their cultural context. This helps leaders better understand their constituents' points of view and reassess role relationships and interactions in different ways. Cultures bring different perspectives to issues of participatory leadership, decision making, performance review, team work and time orientation. Presumptions and values attributed to certain cultures inevitably produce different understandings and behaviours in other cultures. For example, in a Western cultural context efficiency and order often appear to have their own immutable logic. This is not necessarily the case when we take other cultural perspectives into consideration.

When leaders seek authenticity through understanding and valuing other cultural perspectives, they encourage like behaviour throughout the school. As Riehl suggests: 'School leaders promote culturally responsive teaching by demonstrating a culturally responsive approach themselves in their relations with parents, teachers and students' (cited in Firestone and Riehl, 2005: 23). In a call to recognize the values impacting schools, Begley (1996: 407) states that 'effective school leadership practices need to be, not only contextually differentiated but also sensitive to the value orientations of the various educational

stakeholders'. We take this a step further and suggest that to become an authentic leader it is not enough to be sensitive to different cultural orientations but to actually use them as the basis for ongoing learning. If leaders understand different cultural assumptions it then becomes possible to learn from cultural variation in a way that can lead to improved practices in schools. This strategy uses culture as a device for *examining* leadership beliefs and practices with the aim of exploring new patterns of educational praxis.

The following discussion addresses a number of interrelated learning avenues that may be relevant to leaders in intercultural school contexts. These include the need for leaders to learn beyond standardized descriptions of 'best practice' in schools, learning through simultaneously trusting and mistrusting experience, learning through student learning, learning through variation, learning through looking beyond culture (in terms of students, teachers and the broader community) and learning through curiosity. These are not the only learning avenues available to leaders—there are obviously many others—but we believe they may inform a cognitive platform through which leaders of intercultural schools can authentically mould their leadership understanding and practices.

Learning beyond Best Practice

Leader learning in intercultural contexts entails engaging in self-directed learning, discovery and reflection through interacting with different cultural values and how (and why) they impact school life. Therefore, it cannot be based upon the often decontextualized lists of best leadership practice currently in vogue in many systems. Davis (1997) argues against notions of best practice and advocates the pursuit of what he calls 'wise practices'. His ideas hold applicability for leaders seeking authenticity in intercultural schools. Three assumptions drive his thesis. First, leaders understand what guides their professional endeavour, in other words they possess wisdom of practice. Some can articulate their reflections, legitimizations and rationalizations but for others, practices exhibit their tacitly held understandings. Second, best practices are never contextualized and individuals portrayed as best practice practitioners are always exemplary individuals whereas wise practices are situated thoroughly in context. Other professionals learn about these and acknowledge that the practices enhance authenticity and credibility, in other words they ring true. Third, best practices are ideals, but circumstances and life seldom unfold as leaders wish.

As an example, consider concepts such as democratic school communities. Democratizing reforms call for teachers and even students to openly assert their views, even if they dissent with community values. Such an idea is unacceptable to some cultures where the open expression of diverse views is believed to unnecessarily complicate decision situations. But it is more complex than this: unwillingness to openly debate does not necessarily mean people do

not hold or express diverse views; rather it is a matter of how and when they do so. Collaboration and dissension do occur across cultures but often tend to take place among individuals of approximately equal status. These groups feed opinions to leaders further up the hierarchy through clearly understood formal and informal avenues. Divergent opinions are welcomed as long as they take a subtle and accepted path and are not presented as openly confrontational or challenging. Students, teachers and community members do have opinions, do attempt to influence changes and are interested in school affairs. At the same time, their involvement tends to be hierarchically enacted through a diffuse set of intra-group and inter-group relations, rather than in an arena open to discussion for all. In this way, collaboration builds group consensus and coherence while ensuring that relationships remain harmonious (Hallinger et al., 2005).

In these terms, authentic leadership in intercultural schools rests not on over-generalized lists of what works for others, which are often grounded in mono-cultural assumptive bases, but on a personal, professional learning orientation and awareness that can result in authentic practice. This practice is built around the insights which emerge and accumulate through simultaneously applying intuition and collecting and analysing contextually-informed knowledge and evidence. In essence, leadership learning, particularly in terms of authenticity and contextual appropriateness, is about seeing leading and learning as inseparably integrated. Linda Lambert's (2005) notion of constructivist leadership holds application for leaders in intercultural schools. She (2005: 98) suggests that leadership emerges from the 'nooks and crannies of the school' and is translated into learning as people engage with others. She argues that attempts to standardize leadership are doomed 'to be short-lived, shallow and unsatisfying if we do not make sense of them within our own contexts'.

Learning to Trust and Mistrust Experience

Authentic intercultural school leaders tread an uneasy line between trusting and mistrusting their previous experience and learning. Given the demands of their jobs, they confront a natural tendency to rely on previous experience to guide them through new situations. The normative behaviours which underpin school life generally remain rooted in the values of the particular dominant cultural group. For example, Villa and Thousand (1995: 31) suggest that in the USA: '... school communities unconsciously still attempt to promote a common, homogeneous culture (i.e., the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, rural culture)'. For school leaders who have served years of apprenticeship within a particular system, normally with culturally similar role models, making a shift in orientation can be problematic and even painful. The natural desire for comfort pushes people toward ignoring cultural differences beyond obvious manifestations such as cultural feasts or UN flag parades. This subtly reinforces the notion that options and ideas are limited.

When working in intercultural contexts, leaders challenge ingrained cognitive patterns or 'patterns of knowing' that are constructed over time within restricted cultural settings. In other words, they recognise that previous experience does not hold all the answers to the different problems they face. Such precursors to learning may be salient in situations as diverse as formulating a pastoral care policy, creating a reporting structure or setting school goals (Walker and Quong, 1998).

Insights can be drawn from Weick's (1996) 'fire-fighting' metaphor. Weick (1996: 567) suggests that, 'Effective fire-fighting occurs when people know what they do not know and simultaneously trust and mistrust experience'. An effective fire-fighting unit has to make decisions based on past experience while being fully cognizant that its past experience is *both relevant and limited*. There has to be both belief and doubt in their knowledge, skills and competencies. This enables effective fire-fighters as a unit to learn, to be creative, to acquire and transfer knowledge, to modify its behaviour and to transform itself, even during the actual task of fighting the fire.

Weick's metaphor may guide those seeking authentic intercultural school leadership. For example, when considering effective learning approaches, school leaders examine pedagogies in terms of their cultural applicability. This involves knowledge of and reflection upon how various cultural groups learn, what knowledge is valued, how they relate to authority (or a lack-there-of) in classrooms and appropriate forms of culture-sensitive assessment. In a study of intercultural schools in the UK, Walker (2005a) found that teachers and head teachers often left their awareness of culture 'at the classroom door', and downplayed its influence on learning and teaching, sometimes due to demands accompanying central assessment requirements. This tension between culture and policy was closely related to the failure of the formal curriculum to reflect cultural diversity. Building on Starratt's (2005) work on authenticity and learning-centred leadership, leader authenticity in intercultural schools is founded on awareness of the place of culture in learning and teaching while addressing the more instrumental approaches demanded by common accountability mechanisms. A singular concentration on the latter may lead to neglected opportunities to infuse culture into the curriculum which may, in turn, negatively impact on student engagement, achievement and outcomes.

One important caveat runs through all aspects of our discussion. Becoming authentic calls for leaders to question, but not deny, their own culturally based ways of working. There is a big difference between learning to see one's own cultural origins in concert with others and surrendering these completely. Put simply, for intercultural leaders, there is no one 'right way of doing things'. Leaders see cultural influences as opportunities to expand their knowledge of learning styles and their repertoire of teaching techniques, classroom management and curriculum tailoring (Mobokela & Madsen, 2003).

Learning through Student Learning

Given the continued academic achievement gap between the majority and most minority students, culture-bound approaches to teaching and learning must be questioned (Dimmock, 2000). As Leithwood and Riehl (2005: 23) note: 'Children in diverse contexts may benefit from culturally responsive teaching, in which instruction is adapted to build on the norms, values, knowledge, skills and discourse patterns associated with students' cultural backgrounds'. Cooper and Jordon (2003) note in their discussion of African-American male students that minority students can be better served educationally when traditional notions of teaching and learning are reconceptualized. It is axiomatic that different cognitive strategies used by students for learning have implications for teachers in their choice of teaching strategies and for leaders in promoting efficacious learning cultures and practices in schools. Since the cognitive processes and technical skills involved in learning vary across cultures, this should be reflected in different interpretations of leadership.

An example of culture-sensitive teaching strategies is recounted by Rothstein-Fisch et al. (1999). They describe problems faced by teachers in the USA who teach students from Central and South America. These students come from group-oriented cultures, which in turn influence how they learn and interact in social and educative settings. A group orientation, or collectivism, emphasizes the interdependence of family members and children are taught above all to be helpful to others and to contribute to the success and welfare of the group to which they belong, beginning with the family. Even knowledge of the physical world is placed within a social context. In contrast, American, Australian and British schools tend to foster individualism, viewing the child as an individual who needs to develop independence and value individual achievement. Whereas collectivism emphasizes the social context of learning and knowledge, individualism emphasizes information disengaged from its social context. The orientation embedded in the cultures can cause students to misinterpret the teacher's expectations and interactions. Therefore, understanding and addressing such influences and their effects is essential if leaders are to make a difference in their schools. This is the underlying basis of leader authenticity.

As noted above, the very meaning of learning and teaching encompassed in the constructivist tenets of 21st century Western education reformers may differ dramatically from the traditional model of education practiced in many cultures. Decontextualized education reforms may challenge intercultural schools within Western societies as much as they do in schools adopting such reforms in non-Western societies. The challenge to leaders seeking authenticity arises from the suitability of many of the reform-implanted pedagogical methods themselves. A particularly salient example of this is the case of student-centred learning approaches that underpin constructivist notions of a classroom community. These are foreign in many cultures. In the East Asian

educational context, for example, the concept that students can learn without direct instruction from the teacher and through exercising their voice seems on initial consideration absurd. As Shaw (1999: 23) points out: 'Blaming Asian schools for focusing on memorization—as opposed to 'thinking'—is too pat an excuse, as schools reflect the basic values of a society. It is ingrained in the Asian psyche that 'correct' answers always exist and are to be found in books or from authorities.'

Learning through Variation

Leader authenticity in intercultural schools, then, is constructed by learning from cultural variation. This acknowledges the gulf between the status quo and new approaches. In order to learn from new ideas leaders must recognise that schools are comprised of individuals and groups who have different cultural values, motivations and beliefs. Good leaders understand that everyone in a school constructs a personal reality of the organization to whose success they contribute (Whiteley, 1995).

Authentic leaders seek to understand and bring together sets of different realities, or cultures, in order to form a holistic identity for the school. Starratt (1993) notes that we often assume leaders and followers inhabit the same meaning-world. In reality, however, those who share a common space in the world, namely a school, inevitably negotiate meaning. Moreover, in an intercultural and multi-class society, we cannot assume that leaders and other members of the school community—be they students or teachers—will necessarily make similar attributions of meaning (also see Tierney, 1996). One example of this can be drawn from insights into how different cultural groups conceive of and foster community (Hallinger and Leithwood, 1996).

Recent work has investigated how differences in values influence leadership in East Asian schools and their implications for leadership in a global education community. These implications apply equally to students, staff and community members. A general understanding reached is that school leadership in this region continues to be fundamentally concerned with the moral development of individuals and the creation of community, but that community manifests in a cultural context that differs markedly and systematically from the West (Hallinger et al., 2005).

Examples of cultural influence, as it occurs in many Asian and Middle-Eastern communities, typify the connection between vertically aligned cultural systems and the impact these systems exert upon social relations in organizations. For example, persons of lower status (i.e. age or position) defer to those of higher status, accepting differences in power as a normal feature of social relations. This perspective holds that educational leaders and followers consequently tend to be more conscious of status and hierarchy than colleagues in Western contexts, even as they are more conscious of the need to foster community. There is tacit acquiescence among followers that as long as the

leaders' behaviours remain aligned with the cultural norms of Asian and Middle Eastern communities, they have the right to direct others. This respect and acquiescence is publicly accorded inside and outside of schools even when the leaders' competence is in doubt or a poor decision is about to be made. In return for this status-based respect, leaders are expected to protect followers in terms of their face and job security. Such societies are also explained through their collectivist orientation, which suggests that people form their personal perspectives first and foremost in terms of significant group associations. Consistent with collectivism, individual teachers, as well as the leader, subjugate their personal needs, ambitions and, if necessary, their opinions in the interests of the greater good of the school. For leaders with staff or other community members holding such beliefs, the social dynamics within school decision making become very different from that suggested in traditional literature in the area (Hallinger et al., 2005).

The combination of high power distance (the extent to which less powerful member of institutions expect that power is distributed unequally) and collectivism creates an interesting twist when it comes to current Western conceptions of empowerment and distributed leadership. For example, Jansen (2006) questions the place of conceptions of distributed leadership within the context of many South African schools; his arguments may well hold messages for leaders seeking authenticity in intercultural contexts. He (2006: 49) states: 'The study of two South African principals begins to suggest that in a traditional authority-driven culture it is perfectly acceptable to followers, even required, that the leader is visible, prominent and forceful, leading on a mandate to change'.

However, while high power distance reinforces the formal authority accorded to those holding leadership roles, collectivist tendencies place a strong rein on the actual exercise of that power. It is the consensus-building in which leaders engage within the values and norms of their school communities that creates the legitimacy needed to act. Thus, different cultural understandings of empowerment may help explain the stalled progress of reforms simplistically imported from the different contexts (Hallinger et al., 2005).

Learning through Looking Beyond Culture

Authentic leaders view the school and broader society through the lenses of teachers, students and the communities they serve, while at the same time realising that interpretations will also vary within cultural groups. Thus, they attempt to understand the meanings their communities attach to the world and how these meanings are fashioned by their culture and place in society. For example, Muslim students may have very different interpretations of the so-called 'war on terror' than other cultural groups. Given the energy, time and openness leaders need to understand the perspective of a particular cultural group, this is a huge task. Awareness of ethnic groups can also be fraught with misunderstanding and lead to overgeneralizations about specific groups and the

differences between them. The challenge for leaders is to increase their awareness that just as many differences may exist within as between different ethnic groups (Walker and Dimmock, 2002).

Building leader authenticity involves addressing the subtly-embedded consequences of cultural variation, such as racism, not just their visible indicators. Leaders in intercultural schools push themselves to look beneath their pre-determined worldviews and look deeply into the community for causes of social injustice and how this impacts school life. They understand variation as being multilayered, mirroring Henze's (2000) finding that effective school leaders in the USA viewed conflicts on a continuum. To use her words: 'The most overt conflicts, such as physical fights and racial slurs, are at one end; underlying conflicts and tensions, such as avoidance of certain groups and perceptions of unequal treatment, are in the middle. At the other end are the root causes of ethnic/racial conflicts, including segregation, racism and inequality—conditions endemic to the larger society ...' (2000: 2). Looking beyond culture holds implications for authentic understanding of teachers, the broader community and students.

Students

Paradoxically, defining authentic leadership in intercultural schools involves sometimes putting aside the focus on culture and ethnicity. In other words, authentic leaders are careful not to fall into the trap of attributing all events to cultural influence—they realise that other factors are also obviously in play. For example, leaders seeking authenticity challenge the assumption that culture lies at the core of all educational and social disadvantages. Whereas it is obvious that there is strong relationship between social disadvantage and certain cultural groups, other factors also have a major impact on students and school life.

Geographic location, history, socio-economic status (SES), local politics and the stability of the school population all have powerful effects on the success of the student and the school. Dimmock et al. (2005) found an example of this in their study of UK schools. One of the head teachers involved explained that both within and outside of the school white students are categorized in terms of SES, while coloured students are categorized in terms of their ethnicity; this had the effect of discounting economic and class distinctions as being equally influential within as between cultures. This manufactures false impressions that all members of an easily identifiable group always hold the same values and/or that cultural homogeneity requires less active understanding of individual and sub-group values.

Teachers

This has implications for authentic leadership not only in terms of understanding the students' perspectives, but also the teachers' points of view. Exploration

of intercultural school settings often ignores the fact that teachers may or may not be drawn from different cultural groups—having a multicultural staff adds a new dimension of understanding for leaders seeking authenticity. For example, Mobokela and Madsen (2003: 104) cite the comments of one African American teacher in the United States concerning fellow teachers: 'Teachers here think I know everything about black children, but I never grew up in the city and never experienced the difficulties these students have had . . . Yet, the teachers expect me to have access to every Black student, and I find that really troubling.' Teachers drawn from different cultural groups in intercultural schools may, for example, be reluctant to confront leaders, express dissent and criticize peers since these behaviours could damage relationships within their community. Non-recognition of such values and associated behaviours can present leaders with a false view of teacher innovation and motivation.

For authentic leaders, understanding the cultural make-up and influences of teachers is as important as understanding the students and the community. This is true whether the different cultures fit or not. For example, it is certainly not unusual in some schools for the cultural make-up of teacher groups to be completely different from the cultural composition of the student population (Blair et al., 1998). As policies have attempted to recruit a more balanced mix of teachers from different groups principals have been forced to deal with the problem of tokenism. Research in the USA has shown that token representation of minorities can highlight their visibility within the school. Mobokela and Madsen (2003) found that such visibility can lead to the marginalization of minority staff. In their study of African-American teachers, Mobokela and Madsen (2003) found that boundary heightening influenced their interactions with European American teachers in terms of differences in pedagogical and management strategies, debunking negative stereotypes held about children of colour and negotiating insider-outsider statuses. In terms of the latter, the minority teachers 'were seen as insiders who provided insights about students of color', but, on the other hand, 'they were treated as outsiders whose narrowly defined African-American expertise resulted in their being isolated and unable to attain informal social power' (2003: 102). Based on the lessons of such experience, leaders seeking authenticity learn to understand teachers, regardless of their cultural origins, and value them for more than just their cultural knowledge and connection.

The Broader Community

For leaders seeking authenticity it is important to understand and learn from the values of parents and other community members. These values can take very different shapes depending on the cultural group(s) within the broader community. For example, while the sharing of decision-making power with parents is reasonably well accepted in many Western cultures, throughout a broad range of Asian societies parents have been traditionally placed outside

the formal and informal power boundaries of the school. Cheng (1995: 97) explains the reason for this: 'Schools are seen as irresponsible if decisions have to rely on parents who are not supposed to be professionals in education'. In societies with large power disparity it is difficult for principals to encourage others to become openly and honestly involved in decision making, even if they want to. In many cases, they are seen as neglecting their leadership role if they do not take a strong personal stand.

Conversely, members of some cultural groups may be reluctant to actively participate in school-level decision making because this is seen as the responsibility of the professionals. Schools themselves may be seen as somewhat inept if they rely on parents to make decisions. So while principals are expected to actively involve school community members in decision making, they are hindered not only by their own traditional values and authority, but also by the reluctance of parents to become involved.

Learning through curiosity

Leaders in intercultural schools, especially during their formative years, can become uncomfortable when faced with both the hidden or less obvious influences of culture. The strain created by being uncomfortable, anxious and lacking knowledge can produce a form of cognitive conflict. Cognitive conflict is the tension created when what a leader believes they know and value is challenged by what actually is valued or by alternate positions. Tensions often emerge when we critically reflect on new data. In other words, when leaders are exposed to new knowledge about different cultural constructions they come to realize that there is a difference between what they think they know and what is being revealed. Contending with tensions that arise from working with multiple and often incongruent values prompts curiosity, which, in turn, leads to more tensions; the process is cyclical.

Curiosity has a number of characteristics which support the search for authenticity. Curious leaders maintain an open mind, actively wonder about issues, ask many questions and show interest in the possibility that 'reality' is not always as it appears at first glance (Walker and Quong, 2005). Curiosity is also about reframing or the capacity to see things in new ways—ways that generate fresh options for leadership action and for learning. Common examples of reframing include using different cultural perspectives or angles to examine an enduring problem, getting community leaders and students involved in brainstorming and discussion or looking below obvious or surface issues. Curiosity is important because, as noted above, much of what leaders know about leadership and schools has been pre-programmed by somewhat restricted cultural notions. In other words, personal knowledge depends upon a capability for curiosity, not simply 'knowing that'.

The skill of an authentic educative leader is to use the tension that comes from the simultaneous pulls associated with leading in intercultural settings as

opportunities to learn. As such, creative tension is fertile ground for learning, developing authentic understanding and exploring the different ways to proceed in practice. The creative tensions leaders are faced with are rarely amenable to logical, simple codified knowledge, and they require personal leadership knowledge which stems from the development of practical and creative intelligence, not just analytic intelligence. Exploring the answers to questions such as: 'How do I overcome the contradiction between contextualizing school programmes to meet the needs of my local community while also responding to system initiatives and national mandates?'; or: 'How can the different cultural values represented in the school community be brought toward a common respect for both minority and majority aspirations?' do much to drive the learning necessary for authentic leading.

Conclusion

To speak of intercultural school settings implies the interrelations between a multitude of different cultural groups and values. The term intercultural implies more than just two cultures clinically examined in isolation from the rest of the world as an abstraction or a dualism. It does not suffice to focus on the relationship of one powerful culture to several other minority cultures. Indeed, working in intercultural schools holds significant implications for leaders seeking authenticity in that they must understand that diverse groups—be they students, teachers or others—can hold very different values and expectations and this can create blockages to promoting social justice. Authentic leadership in any setting must be constructed within the micro and macro context of the school. This context describes a complex and continually changing fusion of an individual's predisposition, values and stage of development, the values underpinning their society and multiple other features impinging on their leadership world (religion, gender, policy and politics to name but some) as well as their organizational environment.

Authentic leadership in intercultural schools must be particularly attuned to the values, beliefs and behaviours of the students, teachers and others which comprise the community. In other words, it aims to gain intercultural understanding and use this understanding to inform leadership beliefs and practice. Given that this also transpires within an environment in perpetual motion, leader authenticity cannot have a stated end-point, it must also continually evolve. To lead in ever-shifting environments leaders must embrace learning on an ongoing basis. Therefore, authentic leadership and learning can be viewed as inseparably twinned. Learning for authenticity, however, does not happen spontaneously, it must be purposefully pursued. In order to build understanding, leaders seek out cultural meanings in order to learn from them. Those who ignore culture, or proceed on the assumption that it has no impact on learning styles, organizational behaviour or how people relate to each other and their worlds are not seeking authenticity. Knowing what you don't know

involves intercultural school leaders confronting their own ingrained ways of working and gearing the resulting dissonance toward learning for authenticity.

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